

Introduction

The new information and communication technologies (ICTs) have become an indispensable ingredient in any thinking about governance and public management modernization anywhere in the world¹. Few government institutions – from the local to the international levels - today question the potential of e-modernization. E-modernization is widely believed to improve the quality of life for public employees and citizens, purportedly by leading to reductions in costs and time, and by opening up new channels of communication between managers and employees, between the governing and the governed.² Proposing e-modernization as a panacea for curing the diseases of modern state organizations is clearly an idea that is traveling worldwide, and it is intrinsically related to conceptions of proper governance and innovative and efficient management. Such conceptions defy any simple definition, but they are unthinkable without implicit assumptions of power and authority relations.

Drawing on theories of governmentality and actor network, this article sets out to investigate processes of translation and authority construction involved in organizational change and managerial innovation through e-modernization. More specifically, our analysis will focus on two state authorities, one in Mexico and one in Denmark, as well as on a Sweden-based transnational network, all of them engaged in the promotion and adaptation of e-modernization. Our concern is with how these organizations translate ideas of e-modernization into organizational arrangements that establish crosscutting spaces of interconnectedness and alignment. We refer to these arrangements as globalizing webs. It is our contention that the exertion of governmental and managerial authority increasingly depends on the creation of such globalizing webs, as they facilitate the construction, negotiation and legitimacy of political authority. Exploring how organizations and the people who inhabit them relate to ideas such as e-modernization and transform them into governance and managerial practices is of course highly complex. Reformers operating from the global to the local levels may appropriate new ideas in a variety of ways, such as through formal management education, international conferences and professional networks, evaluation practices and benchmarking exercises, financial, business and popular media including new software, or through best-selling management books purchased in airport lounges (e.g. Newton 1996; Hansen, Langer and Salskov-Iversen 2001). What is spreading is not a new practice as such, but accounts of this practice, which are translated into social practices in local contexts through editing processes (Sahlin-Andersson 2001: 54) – or repertoires of traveling images that are

¹ See e.g. Fountain 2001; and Nulens and Van Audenhove 1999: 451-471.

² In a similar vein, an increasing number of private companies and civil society organizations around the world are currently adapting ICTs as part of their managerial, organizational or mobilization strategies, giving rise to conceptions such as the ‘networked business model’ and ‘citizen networks’. See Castells 2001; Deibert 2000: 255-272; and Deibert 2003.

appropriated by local actors as frameworks for action, and in the process, both provide for a certain element of homogeneity and give rise to new or subtly different practices (Czarniawska and Sévon 1996).

Recent research has empirically investigated the links through which particular global meanings and conceptions of statecraft, governance and management are generated, diffused, appropriated and edited in local settings. These links have been conceptualized under a wide variety of headings, such as transnational discourse communities, assuming shared meanings and interests among state professionals, consultants and researchers operating within the field of public administration (Salskov-Iversen et al 2000; Bislev et al 2002; Hansen et al 2002; Stone 2002). This paper tries a different track by exploring the journey of managerial ideas – epitomized by e-modernization – as globalizing webs. Analytically, the formation of globalizing webs does not presuppose a set of shared meanings and interests taking shape of a community. Globalizing webs are not fixed or completed organizational entities, but orderings or arrangements in process. Neither do they require a meta-narrative of globalization and management to be subscribed to by different actors, although transboundary processes are clearly a distinctive feature of them. What they do presuppose, however, is the view that any social, political or economic ordering in time and space is created from a complex network of localized social and technical practices and devices (Barry 2001:12). These practices and devices make it possible to link calculations and action at one place with calculations and actions in another place. Such linkages involve processes of translation. Precisely because the term translation by definition implies a movement from place to place, the study of globalizing webs provides a glimpse of how ideas travel, what makes possible the creation of alignment and association between the different nodes in the webs, and by implication, how the authority of the different nodes is constructed and legitimated.

Conceptualizing globalizing webs as relying on translation naturally implies an attention to language. One way to approach this dimension of the translation processes is by means of the notions of intertextuality and intertextual chains as developed by the Critical Discourse Analysis literature. For one thing, intertextuality emphasizes the inherent historicity of language. The concept of intertextual chains, defined as series of texts transformationally related to each other (Fairclough 1989: 130) spells out this key characteristic of language by indicating how we can trace the discursive moment of societal change or reproduction. “Intertextual chains may constitute relatively settled transformational relationships between text types (...). But they often become lines of tension and change, the channels through which text types are colonized and invested, and along which relationships between texts are contested” (ibid: 312-133). Drawing attention to the historicity and interconnectedness of language is of essence, but the social and political character of the linkages and chains that purportedly both underpin and are constituted by the textual manifestations and transformations need further conceptualization.

A complementary way to approach translation and its relation to language is discussed in the literature based on Foucault. According to Miller and Rose (1990: 6), all government depends on the creation of a language "that claims both to grasp the nature of that reality represented, and literally to represent it in a form amenable to political deliberation, argument and scheming." In this account, language is not viewed as concrete text and intertextuality, but rather as a kind of intellectual and conceptual machinery that makes reality thinkable in such a way that one can act upon it. Language also mediates between the general and the particular, so that a kind of identity or mutuality can be created between aspirations and the means to fulfill them. In this vein, translation is what happens when general political rationales, often taking a problematizing and programmatic form, are transformed into activities and linkages within given or specific problem area by means of a variety of governmental mechanisms and technologies. Further, it is precisely these activities and linkages that carry the potential for creating loose associations and networks across time and space: "To the extent that actors have come to understand their situation according to a similar language and logic, to construe their goals and their fate as in some way inextricable, they are assembled into mobile and loosely affiliated networks...[such networks] are made between those who are separated spatially and temporarily, and between events in spheres that remain formally distinct and autonomous. When each can translate the values of others into its own ambitions, judgments and conducts, a network has been composed that enables rule 'at a distance'" (Rose and Miller 1992: 184).

The conception of rule at a distance has both a social and geographical form and is based on two important assumptions. First, it draws on Latour's conception of authority as something that is not possessed, but comes out as an effect of association. In other words, the authority of an actor, organization or institution depends on its capacity to successfully enroll and mobilize others in the pursuit of its goals. Second, it is based on the assumption that (neo) liberal rule, because it carries the twin project of creating and preserving the private (in the broad sense of the term) while shaping the conduct of privacy, is bound to authorize authorities beyond the state. In other words, for the state to govern at a distance in both social and spatial senses it must operate through the decisions and self-responsibility of non-state actors – their autonomy must be authorized. This, in turn, requires translation processes and governmental technologies that ally the objectives of government with the projects and autonomy of such actors.

The following study of a globalizing web provides an insight into how the journey and translation of the idea of e-modernization is contingent upon the formation of loose alignments such as the one that spans our three analytical units, and how this idea, in the process of being translated constructs and re-constructs relations of authority between state and non-state organizational forms. The first section unfolds the empirical grounding on which our conceptual thinking rests. It is, in essence, an attempt at illustrating the dynamics of one such configuration of globalizing webs. It analyzes how

programmatic elements of the e-modernization vision is being appropriated for varying purposes and invested with particular if varying meaning as it is being fed into a wide variety of organizational activities in our three cases - the Federal Government of Mexico, the City of Næstved in Denmark and the Stockholm Challenge. Even if the participating nodes in this web and individual manifestations of the e-modernization vision across the localities that are connected via these webs bear very few if any similarities with each other, each of them relies on the formation of a globalizing web for their authority and legitimacy. In the second section of the article, we put these empirical observations into perspective, elaborating and discussing the implications of globalizing webs for relations of authority.

I. The formation of a globalizing web ³

The first two cases look into a Mexican and a Danish state authority respectively. In both cases the engagement in the Stockholm Challenge – a non-state authority - is both an integrated element of their compliance with and enactment of e-modernization, just as it can be seen to further their own schemes. The third case maps the history, rationale, activities and relations of the Stockholm Challenge. It describes the dynamics that inscribe this organization with the authority to bring others into alignment, even if this alignment is invariably a loose and indeterminate one. Overall, our main concern is with how the organizations under scrutiny translate ideas of e-modernization into organizational arrangements that establish crosscutting spaces of interconnectedness and alignment: globalizing webs.

Mexican Public Authorities

Upon his presidential inauguration in December 2000, ex-Coca-Cola executive Vicente Fox proposed an ambitious national programme. The prime objective of the project was to build out the country's Internet infrastructure and get its approximately 100 million citizens online. At the time, the initiative, which was dubbed 'E-Mexico', was by no means exceptional for developing economies. Similar large-scale e-modernization programs were being fostered in Latin America, in Asia and Eastern Europe.

Today, when you try to access one of the innumerable and expanding government-operated portals in Mexico, you will most probably run into the comprehensive e-Mexico Portal – www.e-mexico.gob.mx - which is the online manifestation of the 'e-Mexico National System' (eMNS). A public policy instrument of the e-Mexico initiative, the eMNS was established in 2001, with a

³ The following accounts are based on interviews with officers at the eMNSGC in Mexico City in November 2003, the City of Næstved in February 2004, and The Stockholm Challenge in January 2004 as well as on policy documents issued by these and related authorities.

specific view to fostering the transition of Mexico " towards the Information and Knowledge Society, integrating the efforts of different public and private actors in this task, and attracting the rest of the Mexicans" (SCT 2003:1). A special task force and coordination unit with approximately 20 officers and specialist – the 'e-Mexico National System General Coordination' (eMNSGC) - was established and placed under the auspices of a central federal authority, the Secretary of Communication and Transportation. In formal terms, the eMNS is an integral part of the Fox administration's National Development Plan (2000-2006), which continues the efforts towards deregulation and simplification, but now subsumed under the heading of Innovation. One of the main priorities of the new administration has been to further improve the quality and efficiency of government services, and to fundamentally change the government-citizen relationship through the creation of a digital space. The e-government model that is supposed to shape this space in the future is, according to eMNSGC officers, infused by total quality management ideas, the ideals of lean and inclusive government, the conceptions of open, ethical and responsible government. It is supposed to create proactive, flexible and reliable government, in particular by enhancing on-line citizen services and aligning local, state, regional and federal services.

These programmatic claims about the role of e-modernization are clearly anchored in particular problematizations of Mexico's past and establish the inevitability of innovation. Public administration in Mexico has historically been known as formalistic and inefficient, shaped by the absence of transparency and administrative accountability (Hansen 1998; 2002). A large numbers of forms – *trámites* - and complex filing and renewal procedures have not only made business activity a difficult affair, but also made citizen confidence in government very difficult. After Mexico became a member of the OECD in 1994, the Ernesto Zedillo administration (1994-2000) launched an ambitious programme of administrative and regulatory reform. Its aim was to reduce bureaucratic red tape through simplification of administrative procedures, to reduce of regulatory formalities and to instigate reforms of the legislative frameworks, and to get rid of what has been publicly characterized as the 'disease of forms' – *tramitis* (Kossick 2003). *Tramitis* had given rise to vast networks of *middlemen* and corrupt exchanges as people, generally unaware of how, when, and where to submit forms, saw no other way than bribe their way through the system. During the Zedillo administration, however, there were few experiments with e-government as a tool to get rid of *tramitis*, and they were mostly found at the subnational level. A predecessor of the full-scale national e-strategy under President Fox and coordinated by the eMNSGC, the experience from the small state of Colima is cited by Federal officers as one of the important sources of inspiration for what later became the e-Mexico National System (eMNS).

Against the backdrop of the above narrative of governmental mismanagement, and operating with limited financial resources from the government, the eMNSGC has since its creation initiated a number of highly complex and interlinked activities. Overall, these activities reflect a concern

with the low levels of Internet access and with the lack of computer familiarity among Mexicans. First, eMNSGC has set out to enhance connectivity through the development and expansion of a Digital Community Centers (DCC's) network to non-connected communities, with a specific view "to intercommunicating all Mexicans between themselves, and with the rest of the world" (SCT 2003:1). An e-Mexico satellite network was launched in June 2003, providing connectivity to 3,200 DCC's covering all municipal heads in Mexico. Agreements have been made with institutions specialized in distance training and with certified programs to educate so-called "facilitators" whose task is to induce and help citizens to use the DCC equipment on location. As such, the capacity to "appropriate" information and knowledge technologies is an important aspect of the programme: every community in the country has to identify and communicate its own needs, in order to assure "that the e-Mexico National System is responding to their needs and develops digital services according to each community" (SCT 2003: 4). Moreover, a so-called Virtual Private Network is being established between all the dependencies of the Federal Public Administration in the country, with a specific view to enhancing processes of "digital sharing" and "effective communication Government to Government, Government to Citizen and Government to Business" (SCT 2003: 3).

Second, e-Mexico National System has developed integrated service platforms on-line – i.e. portals - for citizens. The design of the service platforms are informed by the following core values: Top-down design, bottom-up implementation; national coverage; private and public participation; privacy and security usage; reliable services; integration of Mexican social ethical values, and community-based operations. These platforms address six areas and sets of objectives: (i) e-Learning, to provide new tools for accessing knowledge, education and training; (ii) e-Health, to increase the general welfare by providing the Mexican population with health information, obviating the social, cultural and geographic obstacles to the access to the health services; (iii) e-Economy, to accelerate the development of the digital economy in micro, small and medium sized businesses, and to stimulate a "digital services culture, using digital sharing processes and promoting value chains and synergies that can drive the country to the New Economy" (SCT 2003:2); (iv) e-Government, to allow all Mexicans at the municipal, local, regional and federal levels "to exercise their right to be informed" and to get "access to the services provided by the different government levels. Also, the State, by means of the different government instances, reassume its duty of assuring all the population their access to the information related to the public administration"; (v) e-Communities with shared interests, such as indigenous people, migrants, women, handicapped and senior citizens communities among others; and finally, (vi) other e-Services, such as emergency and security services, employment, etc.

One of the key conceptions in social and technological philosophy of e-Mexico is the digital sharing process. Digital sharing is not only viewed in terms of its content, i.e. to what degree it improves the quality of government

and the social and economic well being among Mexicans. It is also seen as a key driver in the process of connecting Mexico up the wider world. Thus, in a broader sense, the digital sharing process is knowledge sharing. Overall such practices of knowledge sharing are expected to contribute to changing social problems into opportunities, and, to converting people's needs into services. The knowledge sharing of the e-MNSG embraces a variety of actors and includes the formal assistance that e-Mexico receives from international agencies, academic institutions, and corporate sponsored IT training programs provided by key IT actors such as Microsoft and Intel (Gori 2002; Islas and Gutierrez 2003). Further, it comprises activities and leading roles in arrangements such as the Latin American Digital Cities Network, engagement in formalized multilateral organizations such as the World Bank and the UN, as well as participation in the World Summit of the Information Society. The e-MNSG also collaborates with officials and specialists from countries such as Korea, Singapore, Malaysia, Sweden, England and Namibia. Relations with Asian countries are viewed as particularly useful: "Their working culture is slightly different from ours – it does our up-an-coming guys good to see how hard and how long hours these people work".

Importantly however, digital sharing is also defined as learning from international best practices and award programs. When we accessed the e-Mexico Portal in May 2004, its news section on the front page contained the following message: *e-México: Finalista en Stockholm Challenge. Haz click aquí para conocer los detalles*. One more mouse click and the following details popped up:

"This year, the e-Mexico Portal has been selected as finalist in the e-government category and will be competing with other prominent cases. This symbolizes the progress in the use of better technologies in government. On the other hand, it also positions the portal as a unique government project in Latin America, with its focus on the citizen and its high social impact" (http://www.e-mexico.gob.mx/wb2/eMex/eMex_Premio_Stockholm, accessed on 7 May 2004, our translation).

While surfing the e-Mexico Portal's news section, we also discovered that another governmental web portal, organized under the eMNSGC, had been selected for the Stockholm race, namely the Citizens Portal. The screen reads the following:

"The Federal Government's Citizen Portal (www.gob.mx) has received international recognition by being selected as a finalist in the e-government category of the Stockholm Challenge 2003-4. In this way, e-Mexico and gob.mx will represent our country in the award, to which more than 900 projects from 107 countries had been submitted...among the criteria for selecting the finalist stand out innovation, necessity (relevance), accessibility, transferability

and, in particular, the promotion of democracy... it is an honor that the Citizens Portal has been chosen as one of the 24 finalists...the award jury, which is international and composed of experts from all over the world, has after a thorough process chosen the finalists of what is an important award in the realm of the Internet..."

(http://www.e-mexico.gob.mx/wb2/eMex/eMex_eGobierno_Finalista_en_Estocolmo_#, accessed on 7 May 2004, our translation).

Thus, while founding its mission, visions and organizational rationale on the perception of Mexican public administration as being in a process of fundamental and necessary innovation, the eMNSGC insists on the potential societal advantages of getting Mexico e-modernized. And providing information about the international recognition of Mexican public authorities in the realm of e-government is an important ingredient of the language of change and innovation that has characterized Mexico since the 1990s. From another perspective, it also demonstrates how Mexican public authorities depend on the clout of international authorities to certify the efforts being done. In this respect, the submission of the e-Mexico Portal to the Stockholm Challenge competition speaks for itself: it suggests that the Mexican government considers international orientation and authorization in its e-modernization a strategic resource. At a more general level, it indicates awareness of how government organizations increasingly rely on the creation of globalizing webs that facilitate the construction and legitimacy of their political authority, both at home and abroad.

The City of Næstved

The City of Næstved, a provincial city located on southern Zealand with app. 47,000 inhabitants, has for a number of years been particularly attentive to e-modernization as a vehicle for making Information Society happen. In contrast to the Mexican case, e-modernization is not primarily cast as a panacea for curing bureaucratic diseases such as governmental corruption and for profoundly re-creating citizens' confidence in the state. In the City Næstved, the case for e-modernization is argued with reference to its benign implications for learning and knowledge production and knowledge sharing. As already indicated in the above, knowledge sharing was also articulated in the Mexican case, albeit subsumed under an overall and all-embracing state innovation project.

On closer inspection, it turns out that the City of Næstved is strongly engaged in e-projects and collaborative e-efforts both in Denmark and abroad. The engagement in globalizing webs commits members of the organization to contribute to creating and showcasing best/good practices, identifying new ways and exchanging knowledge. One compelling example is

Næstved's submission of e-governance projects to the Stockholm Challenge 2004. Another is its membership of and current vice-chairmanship of Telecities, a major European network of cities 'committed to leadership in the Information and Knowledge Society'. These activities indicate that the global orientation of Næstved's activities is important. The accounts we heard stressed that in Næstved, the particular constellation of senior officers and politicians over the last 10 years are key when explaining the strategic role that transnational networking has played as a vehicle for e-modernization. A special responsibility rests with the Chief Officer who must ensure that what international activities the city engages in are being communicated and translated to relevant units and committees in the organization. For networking to be invested with meaning, to be a vehicle of knowledge sharing, benchmarking and thus steering, politicians and employees must relate to it and take ownership of the rationalities and practices that constitute the common, if diffuse, denominator of the network activities.

A recent survey of the 79 biggest Danish local governments suggests that only a third of the respondents consider international engagement of consequence for their daily business (Salskov-Iversen 2004). The rest readily accept that internationalization is an important factor with major implications also for sub-national government but it is essentially viewed as a top-down phenomenon, not something that sub-national government can or should relate to proactively. The pros and cons revolve around two discourses respectively: the pros draw on a knowledge society discourse, stressing the strategic implications of reaching out, of learning, of networking, while the cons draw on a it's-a-waste-of-tax-earners'-money discourse. Næstved clearly belongs to the one third of local governments that consider international orientation as a strategic resource. These are the grounds Næstved gives for submitting projects to the Stockholm Challenge and, more generally, being internationally networked:

"Because we have something to share with other organizations. And because, no matter whether you are nominated or not [Næstved was not nominated in the 2004 challenges], by the time you have submitted a project, you have become so much more knowledgeable about your own organization. Everytime we do this, we bring the project before the relevant political committee, to engage them and demonstrate to them how we work with this tool, to create political ownership of the process. The Danish cultural institution known as the Jante Law is a real killer when it comes to using excellence as an organizational driver. In Næstved we insist that our politicians go abroad once in a while and project the municipality and experience that by international standards we are doing a good job, and bring back valuable new ideas. It's quite amazing what you can get from spending 895 DKR on a Virgin ticket" (interview with Næstved senior officer, February 2004).

Clearly, Næstved's submission of projects to the Stockholm is brought into play differently in this locality than in the Mexico case. For Næstved, the Challenge initiative may not in itself seem so consequential, partly because Næstved was not nominated. But, when put into context, it tells two other stories: first, it is indicative of a certain mindset on the part of the leading politicians and officers, an awareness of the dynamics of translation in transnational networking. Second, its organizational implications become more far-reaching when you realize that engaging in the Challenge is not an isolated phenomenon, that it flows from Næstved's involvement in other transnational networks (some of whom, as we shall see, owe their beginnings to the Stockholm Challenge), notably Telecities.

Næstved's membership of Telecities was a result of its gradual recognition of the limits of e-modernization experience and knowledge in Denmark. In 1997-98, when Næstved opened its Service Centre it worked together with four other Danish authorities to explore and generate innovative e-government. In 1998-99 the city realized that the outcome of these efforts did not justify the investment and that it needed a platform from where it could contribute to the development of either national or European information and communication technology standards. Næstved's subsequent participation in a project designed to create a common Danish framework e-administrative solutions was also found too narrow in its scope and potential. Næstved then seriously began to target a European platform, applying for EU project funds. The city succeeded in getting funds, and got involved in Telecities. Telecities has ever since proved an important vehicle for tapping into the sort of rich and diverse network that the city had been looking for and which is today the main plank of its international activities. And it has over the years steadily increased Næstved's engagement in and appetite for web entrepreneurship – the latest example being its bid for fame and exposure through the Stockholm and Dubai Challenges (a sister award, see below).

The sustainability, and by implication, perceived value, of these global activities is a key concern: Næstved and other authorities (Salskov-Iversen 2004) can cite examples of contacts and networks that somehow faded out, or never really got off the ground, and, in so doing, discredited the authors of the initiatives. A critical factor, then, is thus successfully to connect these initiatives, channels and fora to specific people in the organization. The knowledge that is appropriated must be ploughed back into the organization where it matters, not least to test Næstved's own approaches, to feed hands-on experience from its frontline service back into the web and to identify partnerships that can help develop the city. If this is not carefully attended to, the global engagement cannot as readily, if at all, be mobilized as a source of legitimacy and authority when specific actions and initiatives are being introduced and sought implemented in the organization.

Despite the effort that Næstved's senior officers and leading politicians put into connecting and involving the practitioners and councillors to e.g. the Telecities activities, the city's international engagement is not uncontested. Among the proponents, this is a cause of concern, because it

suggests an inherent hesitance, or even inability, in certain parts of the world of local government, to embrace knowledge society. The role of civil servants, also in local government, is changing towards a more active engagement in problem identification and solving as well as development, not only by way of managing but also by way of networking across institutional and geographical borders and with more emphasis on learning and innovation. Interestingly, in Næstved, this argument is put forward with reference to the OECD and its writings on the correlation between a competent public sector and a strong economy: Also the public sector must be proactive, innovative, efficient and effective, and to that end it needs to reach out, not only to citizens but also to other actors and sectors, to partner and to network. The implication is that traditional administrative traditions and hierarchical systems do not sit easily with the sort of learning mode that underpins the vision of the knowledge society:

“Getting permission to consult best practice in Dublin rather than in Fladså can be quite a challenge. Benchmarking, and international benchmarking, may be a fad, but in my opinion it can be a highly effective technology if you get your criteria for comparing and evaluating right, and, importantly, if you accept that there may be room for improvement in your own organization. In its recent report on Learning Regions, the OECD discusses the correlation between success, failure and learning. We could learn a lot from this report. For a municipality, relevant sparring partners and relevant knowledge are not necessarily to be found in the neighboring authorities – what matters are the issues and the parameters according to which these issues are being approached” (senior officer, Næstved, February 2004).

In Telecities, Næstved is currently involved in a Charter of e-rights project, an area of high priority in Næstved. The city is concerned that formulating the principles guiding e-privacy should not be left to IT experts or reactive public servants. The vision is to provide a free-of-charge e-account for all citizens with their personal data, a daunting task that cuts right across the entire public sector that requires input from many types of actors. The city of Næstved has furthermore committed itself to implementing the e-Europe 2005 Action Plan, which is all about using technology to transform society. Also here is Telecities, and Næstved’s chairmanship of a working group on e-security, e-inclusion and continuous learning, used as a vehicle for driving the city’s e-government vision. The strategic framework for the 2004 Telecities programme is the Knowledge-based City. Næstved is taking part in a benchmarking project, co-led by Deloitte, on how cities use technology to develop their local communities.

Næstved’s mayor also participates in COR (Committee of the Regions), one of the platforms that reinforces its transnational connectedness: “Here you meet some of the same people, the same politicians”, a Næstved

officer says, just as in The Global Cities Dialogue, a forum that has in part emerged from the Stockholm Challenge network (as has Telecities) and that focuses on the political level rather than on the hands-on and how-to-do-it level (as does Telecities). Næstved is not a member of the Global Cities Dialogue, but is on its steering committee, as an observer, on behalf of Telecities⁴. Together, all these networks with their overlapping membership and regular interface work to strengthen the voice of local authorities in e-Europe; and to inscribe those who are active and visible in these circuits in their respective local contexts.

We have now seen how two very different public sector organizations use the Stockholm Challenge as an integrated part of their efforts to e-modernize their respective organizations and the way they service their respective citizens. In both cases, e-modernization is part of a wider narrative on knowledge society, which concerns the demands and opportunities that public sector organizations and their environments are facing, and in both cases we see how this story is translated into specific organizational activities and arrangements. We have also seen that the two organizations clearly do not constitute a community or share a particular destiny – they are as far apart as one can possibly imagine: the translation of e-modernization follow local dynamics and logics. However, they both avail themselves of the same globalizing web – a kind of non-fixed and incomplete arrangement in a crosscutting space of interconnectedness and alignment - and in the process, they also engage socially with professionals and e-enthusiasts from far-flung corners of the world. In the next section we will turn our attention to the Stockholm Challenge, to get an idea of what it is that this kind of organization can offer those who enroll, and its own reasons for playing the role as a node and thus facilitating the globalizing web in the first place.

Stockholm Challenge

The Stockholm Challenge owes its beginnings in 1994 to the European Commission and the Bangemann Report as well as to Sweden and the City of Stockholm, each of whom, at different stages of its life, have used the Challenge as a vehicle for promoting particular agendas. The EU used it as one of many initiatives⁵ designed to instill and disseminate an information

⁴ Some cities are members both places, and then there are Eris@ (the European Regional Information Society Association) and ELANET (which operates under the umbrella of the CEMR, the council of European Municipalities and Regions focusing on the deployment of Information Society at the regional and local level), sister networks of Telecities.

⁵ Over the years, the EU has, in similar vein, spawned or indirectly supported several other fora in order to stimulate and advance new information and communication technologies across Europe, including the eEurope initiative (launched by the European Commission in December 1999 with the objective of bringing Europe on-line) and the related eEurope Awards (funded by the Commission and aiming at highlighting best practices, disseminating and sharing new concepts and ideas in the areas of eGovernment and eHealth); ELANET and Eris@ (see note 4); and IntelCities, a research and technological development project, led by

society culture across Europe. Thus, from 1994-96 the competition went under the title of the Bangemann Challenge, and was limited to eliciting best practice in Europe. From 1997-1999 it was continued as the Global Bangemann Challenge, now in a larger international format. In 1999 the City of Stockholm, which had hosted the competition since its inception as part of its efforts to carve out a name for itself in the EU, took over entirely and the Stockholm Challenge Award was born. From 1999 and up till 2004 the Challenge has thus been an integrated part of the City of Stockholm's continued efforts to consolidate its steadily growing reputation as a high technology hub⁶, just as the Challenge also has acquired a reputation in its own right as a prestigious and authoritative "clearing house for the best and brightest ideas in the area of municipal information technology" (Stockholm Challenge 2002).

As an awards programme for pioneering e-modernization projects world wide, the Challenge has established 6 different categories: e-government, culture, health, education, environment and e-business. Five people in a small office in central Stockholm manage the Awards programme. It runs yearly and is open to already operating projects from the public, private and academic sectors. A 20-30-person jury composed of acknowledged ICT experts, in the beginning mostly from the US but in recent years from all over the world, chooses the finalists. The finalists are showcased at the annual Final Events, which also include seminars, workshops and other networking activities. Importantly, the winners of the award do not receive any monetary prizes. But even if all finalists cannot get an award, "everybody is a winner".

The media effect of participation is receiving particular emphasis by the Stockholm Challenge. In the FAQ section, 'Why meet the Challenge?' is answered in the following way:

"The Stockholm Challenge gives projects the opportunity to participate in a fantastic networking activity where IT entrepreneurs and enthusiasts from all over the world meet and showcase their best solutions. Through exposure to media, politicians and venture capitalists, the Stockholm Challenge gives excellent promotional opportunities for entrepreneurs, universities, cities, regions and countries⁷".

For participants, submitting a project to the annual award programme is thus believed to serve several purposes: a learning experience, a driver for organizational development and an important instance of external

the Cities of Manchester and Siena, bringing together eighteen European cities, twenty ICT companies (including Nokia and Cisco) and thirty-six research groups – the project is part of the European Union's Sixth Framework Programme, with a 6.8 m Euro budget from the EU's Information Society Technologies programme.

⁶ For a discussion of city image construction by the capitals Stockholm, Warsaw and Rome, see Czarniawska 2000: 208-209.

⁷ http://www.challenge.stockholm.se/faq_right.asp, January 17th 2003.

communication. And the reputation factor is important. Winning authorities consider Stockholm Challenge as one of the most prestigious award rallies⁸. Some of the entries are clearly 'accomplished performers', 'beacons' and 'pathfinders', appearing in several both national and transnational best practice and benchmarking/ranking schemes, i.e. organizations/institutions for whom participation is a very strategic choice. Examples include Singapore, Hong Kong, the City of Phoenix, the City of Seattle, Barcelona, and, yes, Stockholm.

In the spring of 2004, the parenthood of the Stockholm Challenge changed again – in the future it will no longer be run by the City of Stockholm. The team in the City of Stockholm Economic Development Agency who have run the Challenge since 1997 summed up the development as follows:

“In Bangemann’s time, only cities could submit projects. This changed after two years when the City of Stockholm took over. At the time, Stockholm realized that an important step towards success in ICT was sharing and accessing knowledge in international networks. The Stockholm Challenge was one of the tools to make Stockholm known as an ICT city, now that’s done. We have achieved the reputation factor. These days we don’t run the Challenge for Stockholm, we don’t do it for the City of Stockholm, there are other networks working for Stockholm. Still, we are doing all this for the tax payers’ money – at this point, we don’t have to run the Challenge ourselves any longer, and that’s why we have externalised the running of it to a partnership, with ourselves as one of the four partners, i.e. the new IT University and two major Stockholm-based companies, one of them is a very important regional actor ... and these days much organizational innovation in Stockholm is based on the public-private partnership model. So this development is almost what could be expected.

The IT University will be the new home of the Stockholm Challenge, we, i.e. the City of Stockholm, will still host the annual award event. Even though the plans have not been signed yet, the IT University will prefer the Challenge to focus more on the 3rd world, and more on technology, less on 'best practice' and the broader organizational implications of applying ICTs. ICT is central to the IT University, for them it is a way to renew their research agenda”⁹

What we get here is a glimpse of the dynamics that keep a loose and unstable assemblage like the Challenge afloat, and by implication, the

⁸ For example, after the Citizen Portal of the Mexican Federal Government turned out as the 2004 winner of the category of e-government on 13 May 2004, it was established on the portal that the government had received an important international recognition “considered the Nobel of the Internet”, see www.gob.mx

⁹ Interview with the Stockholm Challenge in Stockholm January 2004

dynamics that maintain its governmental capacity: namely the continuous negotiation and adjustment of its rationale, organization, anchorage and membership so as to ensure that it can accommodate whatever configuration of persons, organizations and objectives that constitute it at any given point of time. The latest sequel of its history thus reflects a gradual departure from its original orientation, namely e-modernization in the EU and the remainder of the OECD world, in recent years with a clear predominance of entries from the English speaking world¹⁰, towards an 'ICT for Development' orientation, focusing on the potential of ICT in boosting development in the developing countries and connecting them to the developed world. It should be noted, though, that both orientations are embedded in an e-modernization discourse, which has a certain utopian streak to it (Wittel 2001, Fountain 2001):

"The Stockholm Challenge is unique since it provides room for both technically advanced and simple solutions, each of which is judged according to its specific context. This enables projects from both developing and industrial countries to compete on equal terms. Through the Challenge, a large number of very inspiring initiatives from all over the world have been made known. Over the years the Stockholm Challenge has accumulated more than 2,500 projects from all parts of the world. Many contacts have been made between pioneers in different countries all over the world. By highlighting some of the best projects, the Stockholm Challenge helps bring out new models for the information society of tomorrow. The experience of the Stockholm Challenge demonstrates that imaginative and generous ways are possible. In the Challenge you meet the forerunners of digital" democracy
(<http://www.challenge.stockholm.se/about> April 21st 2004)

Still, there are indications that its new developing world orientation causes some sadness to the outgoing management of the Challenge because, even if there will be some overlap, invariably, it will become a different network, brought together by a somewhat different set of objectives and world views. And according to our respondents, in a network like the Challenge, it is the 'people' thing that is crucial for its operation. What the people in the Challenged have shared so far captures the "spirit of the challenge", which is all about one purpose: "Doing something good for the world".

Meanwhile, the former owners of the challenge are busy shifting their energy into other fora, some of which they have co-launched themselves. Firstly, the Challenge has spawned a number of 'baby' challenges, addressing either particular regional or professional themes, e.g. the Global Junior

¹⁰ In 2002, the number of participating projects was 517, with 71 from the USA, 49 from Australia, 41 from India, 40 from Sweden, 30 from Canada, 25 from Italy, 19 from the UK, 15 from the United Arab Emirates, 11 from Bulgaria and 11 from Spain

Challenge (education), the Chile Challenge, the Dubai Challenge, etc. The Challenge is also the co-founder of two other e-networks, Telecities (which was mentioned in the above) and the Global Cities Dialogue, both of which are committed to promoting e-modernization. Similarly, the EU has conceived and co-initiated a whole raft of different e-fora (see note 5). So, while there is clearly a sense in which the people who used to inhabit the Challenge are now moving on, as long as they continue to be involved in activities related to the development and promotion of e-modernization, the chances are that they will meet the very people they used to meet via the Challenge. In other words, once they have joined this globalizing web with overlapping memberships, they are on the eCircuit, and they have, literally, joined a world wide web of people dedicated to the eCause.

II. Globalizing webs in perspective

There is no doubt that the Mexican and Danish public authorities that we have explored in the above share a specific relationship to e-modernization, one that is based on broad and programmatic representations of the advent and challenges of the knowledge/information society. In organizational and societal contexts, such representations are translated and edited for specific purposes, such as internal organizational reengineering and modifications of public sector relations with citizens. While our two public authorities are translating more or less coherent conceptions of e-modernization into organizational practices, they also contribute to the formation of a globalizing web, which turns out to provide them with symbolic resources to be capitalized on.

Globalizing webs provide linkages to forces, actors and entities that act beyond the national purview of each actor. Our two respectively Mexican and Danish authorities have latched onto some of the international and transnational actors who elicit, share and co-produce knowledge about how best to govern, and e-modernization is certainly a vision on offer. In this sense, translation is what happens when actors like our two public authorities are able to count upon a particular way of thinking and acting from other actors, such as transnational actors. The very diversity of the actors enrolled clearly suggests that membership is not in any way conditioned by being concerned about the same issues. What does matter, though, is that the problems, challenges, missions and opportunities faced by these actors can be envisioned and articulated in broadly similar ways, albeit without the goal coherence of strategic alliances. So, what we have here is a kind of fluid organizational arrangement, one that that brings "persons, organizations, entities and locales which remain differentiated by space, time and formal boundaries...into a loose and approximate, and always mobile and indeterminate alignment" (Miller and Rose 1990: 10). By calling such indeterminate alignments globalizing webs, we assume that any social and political ordering is created from complex networks of localized social and

technical practices which link calculations and actions in one place with calculations and actions in another place.

That these webs are globalizing may seem a trivial observation, but it is not. First, as we have seen, globalizing webs articulate a discourse of knowledge, which offers a view of why and how to make the world manageable in a context of globalization (Higgott et al 2000). What we have in this case is a crosscutting space of interconnectedness and alignment, organized around the transformation of public sector organizations through e-modernization and based on particular interpretations of globalization and knowledge/information society. Second, globalizing webs challenge conventional distinctions between the inside and the outside of the nation-state, between the local and the global. They undermine the view of states as disaggregated actors¹¹. In fact, they connect state authorities across this distinction, across different subnational levels of state and relate them to a host of very different actors, including non-state actors and hybrids, indeterminable organizational forms that do not match conventional distinctions between the public and private, such as the Stockholm Challenge, which is organized as a partnership. In other words, globalizing webs can be seen as one organizational instantiation of how social processes are increasingly unhindered by territorial and jurisdictional barriers and enhance the spread of transborder practices in economic, political and social domains (Higgott et al 2000). Third, globalizing webs also have an important technological dimension, as they incorporate and deploy the new information and communication technologies across the boundaries of persons, households, institutions, and public and private spaces. In this way they disrupt and reconfigure the “boundedness and states which is central to the modern political imagination” (Barry 2001:20). We would argue that it is the relative indeterminacy, incoherence, mobility, alignment, combined with the intensive use of new information and communication technologies, that makes our globalizing webs distinctive from the more focused political networks, knowledge networks, epistemic communities and transnational discourse communities referred to in much recent research (e.g. Stone 2002; Haas 1992; Salskov-Iversen et al 2000; Bislev et al 2002; Hansen et al.2002).

The Stockholm Challenge is one of the many nodes in the globalizing web of e-modernization that brings together otherwise very different authorities, such as eMexico and the City of Næstved, around a common cause, namely to further the creation of a knowledge/information society for everyone through e-modernization. Thus, while the fairly general and wide-ranging vision of e-modernization establishes a certain frame for action, a certain direction, it also offers those who eventually engage in it a globalizing web with a multitude of takes and positions to be harnessed in ways that are consonant with the particular aspirations and agendas of the political authorities in question. Viewed as a node in the globalizing web of e-modernization, the Stockholm Challenge reflects not only how e-modernization is at the heart of many governments' reform programs, but also how the

¹¹ For a discussion of the ‘disaggregation of the state’, and ‘a disaggregated world order’, see Slaughter 2004.

adaptation of e-modernization to the existing governance architecture to a large extent is being facilitated by sources of inspiration and authorities from outside traditional government, including the private sector, and not least, by transnational organizational forms such as the Stockholm Challenge.

Authority is understood here as something that has to be made. It is not seen as something that is possessed in advance, in contrast to the more conventional theories of power and authority which emphasize control over resources and sovereignty (Rose and Miller 1992; Latour 1986; Law and Hetherington 2000; Flyvbjerg 2001). This claim is controversial, as it seems to imply that the accumulation of wealth (business), the control over territories and the physical means of violence (the state) or the existence of delegated power (ministers, judges) are irrelevant for the construction of authority. The point here is not to support the claim that power cannot be possessed or accumulated, but rather to illustrate how the effectiveness at enrolling others to one's project can be a very important, if not decisive factor in the construction of power and authority: "Those who exercise the greatest power are those who enroll many others with more resources than themselves, and, more importantly, those who enroll others who are even better at enrolling others than themselves" (Braithwaite and Drahos 2000: 482).

Both the Mexican and Danish authorities rely for their own legitimacy and authority not only on their legal and institutional status as state institutions, but also on the chain of actors that make up the globalizing webs. Thus, the authority of our three organizations is contingent upon their own actions, as well as on the actions of a chain of actors each of whom translates e-modernization so as to fit their respective intentions and projects. However, when tapping into and using the symbolic resources of the globalizing web, for example by submitting projects for award rallies, the Mexican and Danish organizations also recognize and legitimate the authority of purportedly non-political actors. For one thing, by showcasing best practice, by benchmarking and by celebrating excellence in the field of e-modernization backed by specialized and recognized expertise, the hybrid organizational form of Stockholm Challenge shapes, moulds and globalizes a particular understanding of what e-modernization might mean. Moreover, in the course things, it is being recognized as an authority, but unlike traditional political authorities this recognition has no legal or institutional status. It is only based on its certification and promotion of excellence, and on the recognition, legitimacy and prestige it has already gained in the field of e-modernization.

An organizational form such as the Stockholm Challenge is clearly not in the same league as the OECD, or other heavyweight organizations. But it belongs to a big and steadily growing category of transnational organizational forms operating in the shadow of or entirely outside traditional government, fiercely competing for attention and recognition as an authoritative voice in a particular field (Hansen, forthcoming; Hansen and Salskov-Iversen, forthcoming). Their role is to offer expertise and knowledge, forums for knowledge sharing and new ideas. And like our state institutions in the above, their authority can be seen as depending on translation for its

effects. According to a diffusion model, the transmission or diffusion of ideas can be explained by pointing to an initial force, and authority, which possesses resources (Latour 1986). But the Stockholm Challenge and similar creatures do not possess any resources. Their authority is not something that is possessed, as the implicit claim of the diffusion model will have it, but the consequence of the actions of a chain of agents each of whom translates, or better transforms a given set of ideas or pieces of knowledge in accordance with their own intentions and projects. In short, the conceptual movement from authority in a diffusion model to authority in a translation model means to view authority “not as a cause of people’s behavior but as the consequence of an intense activity of enrolling, convincing and enlisting” (Latour 1986:273). To the extent that organizational forms such as the Stockholm Challenge manage to enroll, enlist and align social actors to its purposes, they will gain authority. However, any process of enrollment will always entail the probability that competing organizations are doing a better work, or that social actors will resist or have other objectives than those stipulated by the authority in question. If the construction of authority relies on the translation of ideas and the successful enrolment and subscription to these ideas, it will always be imperfect and can always fade away.

As a final remark, we would like to emphasize that the idea of e-modernization and the closely related practices of global web entrepreneurship (which is of course not restricted to the field of e-modernization) seems both to subscribe to and reinforce a particular governance and management modality (Hansen and Salskov-Iversen, forthcoming). As we indicated in our introduction, (neo) liberal rule is bound to authorize authorities beyond the state. In other words, for the state to govern at a distance in both social and spatial senses it must operate through the decisions, self-responsibility and self-management of non-state actors or hybrid organizational forms. In this process, the expertise and voice of organizational forms beyond the state, such as the Stockholm Challenge, may become authorized. This, in turn, requires translation processes and governmental technologies – both in state and non-state actors, or hybrids - that ally the objectives of government with the projects and autonomy of such actors. The globalizing web is one such governmental technology: Once connected, it provides a means to translate ideas with a view to construct authority and manage organizational reform and societal modernization.

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